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The Final Ties

The Burlington and Missouri, the tardy one of the three railroads building across Iowa to the Platte Valley, had long been expected to build its tracks into Council Bluffs. In the fall of 1868 President James F. Joy of the Burlington came to Council Bluffs with a proposal to make that town its terminus, provided that the citizens would donate twenty acres of ground for a depot. Perhaps the people of that fortunate town believed that the Burlington must build into Council Bluffs perforce, donation or no, if that road hoped to share the Pacific trade. And when, in the summer of 1869, the Burlington was only seventy-five miles away, the newspapers of Council Bluffs confidently asserted that the rails of yet another railroad would soon lead into Council Bluffs. But President Joy had become a heavy stockholder in the line between Council Bluffs and St. Joseph; and the Burlington and Missouri formed a junction with that line at Pacific Junction, running into Council Bluffs upon the same track. On the fourth of December, 1869, the first Burlington train entered the city.

The Sioux City and Pacific Railroad Company, organized in August, 1864, after the Union Pacific had been released from its obligation to construct a branch to Sioux City, began track laying at Cali-

ifornia Junction in September, 1867. The work zipped along: thirty-five miles were completed by December, and fifty miles in all by the first of January, 1868. In a month the line was completed into Sioux City; and from California Junction the Chicago and North Western offered access into Council Bluffs. Twelve years later the Chicago and North Western was to acquire practically all the stock of the Sioux City and Pacific; and the name itself passed away in 1884.

As Council Bluffs entered upon the eighteenth year of its corporate existence — the year 1870 — the town made a résumé of its assets. Not a week was passing without the arrival of several letters of inquiry about Council Bluffs. Its population was about eleven thousand. The list of public buildings was a matter of pride, while business houses were “numbered by hundreds”.

The Union Pacific, finished except for the bridge across the Missouri, was running three freight trains and one express daily; the transfer of freight and passengers was being made by three steam ferry-boats, and the transfer business was far from the least in Council Bluffs. Two trains a day over the Rock Island, two over the North Western, two over the St. Joseph, two over the Sioux City line; and valorous announcements of other railroads who hoped to build into Council Bluffs. . . . Council Bluffs had earned the right to hand itself a cigar. “Now, the election is past, Council Bluffs has been

elected to the highest position that can be given to any city on the upper Missouri river." And Colonel Babbitt of the *Bugle* added, "There is no necessity now for talking and writing about Council Bluffs as we talked and wrote twelve years ago. The clouds that then overhung our destiny have been removed, and the sun of the city's glory is shining fully upon us and all we have to do is to direct its rays to our advantage and future greatness."

But there happened to be one unwelded link in the chain of railroads about Council Bluffs. The Union Pacific bridge was not begun until the completion of the road. When the North Western railway brought freight cars to the east bank of the Missouri, the Union Pacific used car ferries, similar to those great barges which may now be seen about Manhattan Island, to convey freight without reloading to the Union Pacific tracks.

Perhaps the sister cities, with the prize of the Union Pacific to divide between them, inevitably had to quarrel. Perhaps if George Francis Train, irrepressible, extravagant, and vulgar, had not elected himself the spokesman of Omaha, the quarrel would have been less bitter. Perhaps if the citizens of Council Bluffs had had the vision to protest against the building of the Union Pacific bridge at Child's Mill at the first suggestion of that site, Omaha might have been less greedy.

In the winter of 1866-1867 Omaha entered into an agreement with the Union Pacific to donate all the

terminal space that the railway needed; the Union Pacific engineers surveyed the ground that they wished to acquire, and Douglas County authorized a quarter million dollar bond issue to make the purchase, with the understanding that the Union Pacific would build its depot in Omaha. Then came the stunning news that General Dodge had recommended that the Union Pacific build its bridge at the Child's Mill crossing. This crossing offered easier grades (there were high banks upon each side of the river), and the river was rather narrow at that point. But Child's Mill was a few miles below Omaha, and the adoption of that site meant that the Union Pacific would veer sharply to the south from Council Bluffs, leaving Omaha practically upon a siding. A delegation from Omaha bearded the Pacific directors in New York; and at Jay Gould's intervention the order was rescinded. On March 28, 1868, the directors located the bridge at the Train Table crossing, directly linking the two cities.

A Chicago corporation secured the contract to build the bridge, but the first cylinder was not ready for sinking until March, 1869. Exasperated by the delay, the Union Pacific revoked the contract and itself built the bridge.

The editor of the Leavenworth *Bulletin*, in Council Bluffs in May, sauntered down to the river. He was impressed: "The bridge will be the largest one yet projected over the Missouri river — will consist of eleven spans of two hundred and fifty feet each.

. . . When we visited the work, the men were engaged on the first pier on the Iowa side; the first tube of this pier had been sunk to its place, and stood upon the solid rock, eighty feet below the surface. . . . The second tube, when we saw it, was down about forty feet. We spent about an hour and a half looking at the operation, and during that time the big column went down five feet. When looking at these half-dozen men, quietly pursuing their work, with no more fuss or ado about it than a farmer makes in cultivating his field, one can hardly realize that they are successfully and rapidly executing one of the grandest conceptions of modern genius."

The bridge was completed on the twenty-fifth of March, 1873. The Union Pacific seemed inclined to consider Omaha its legal terminus, none the less. A grocery firm, Hall and Morse, like other merchants of Council Bluffs compelled to deliver their freight to the Union Pacific at Omaha, brought the test case. The firm obtained a writ of mandamus against the Union Pacific; the writ, carried to the Supreme Court, was confirmed, and Council Bluffs was assured for all time of the benefits of Lincoln's proclamation. Three railways from the Mississippi to the Missouri, an unbroken connection by rail with St. Louis, and, fifth, the keystone of the structure — the Pacific Railway to San Francisco: was there any better hand in the deck!

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